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**From:** Eileen Furey [dr\_foey@sbcglobal.net]

**Sent:** Tuesday, March 06, 2012 7:29 PM

**To:** AppropriationTestimony

**Subject:** Opposition to the Merger of OPA and CHRO

**Testimony in Opposition to the Merger of the Office of Protection and Advocacy  
for Persons with Disabilities and the Commission on Human Rights and  
Opportunities (HB 5016)**

**Before the Appropriations Committee**

**Presented by: Eileen M. Furey Ph.D.**

**March 8, 2012**

I'm sorry that due to personal commitments I cannot be here to testify in person. I appreciate the opportunity to comment on HB 5016, An Act Implementing the Governor's Recommendations Concerning General Government.

For over 15 years, I served on the Advisory Board for the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities (OPA) and am more convinced than ever that it must remain an independent agency.

Austere times result in drastic measures, some of which have unintended consequences. This, I believe, is the case of the proposal to subsume the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities (OPA) within CHRO or some other entity. The unintended consequence is the very real possibility of the loss of Federal funding for OPA and its sister agencies. The intended consequence seems to be the evisceration of an advocacy agency. Again, the most vulnerable of Connecticut's citizens may be left with no one to stand with them when dealing with a society that often does not respect or value them based on their disabilities. Please do not believe that we have become so enlightened that we don't need advocates for people with

disabilities. Quite simply, we are not that evolved!

The first question I would ask is: "How much money will the State save by combining OPA with another agency?" Most likely, very little. OPA has been doing more with less for years. The second question I would ask is: "How many Federal dollars will Connecticut lose by combining OPA with another agency?" Most likely, several million. Is the loss of federal funding worth being able to say we have created "smaller government?" Finally, I would ask you to consider the stories you have heard from people who have utilized OPA's services, those whose lives have been altered because someone was there to stand with them.

As a Connecticut taxpayer and as an advocate for people with disabilities, I urge you to find the means to keep the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities an independent state agency.

Thank you.

Eileen M. Furey, Ph.D.

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